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JOHN RIXON'S MONEY BOX.

AND OTHER STORIES

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JOHN RIXON PURCHASES A MONEY-BOX.

See page 15.

JOHN RIXON'S MONEY-BOX,

And other Stories.

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JOHN RIXON'S MONEY-BOX.

CHAPTER I.

A DARK CLOUD.

WHAT is the matter with you, Tom?"

"Father has been at me again," was the sulky answer, and Tom Rixon renewed his vicious kicking of the door-post, an occupation which his mother's question had interrupted.

Mrs. Rixon was standing by the kitchen table, cutting slices of bread and butter for her children's supper. She looked up

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as her son spoke, and anxiously scanned his downcast, lowering face, but she said nothing, and turned again with a sigh to her work.

"Look here, mother, I won't stand it much longer, so I give you notice!" burst out the boy, after a moment; "I'm not a child now, and I won't be treated like one. Treated like a child, indeed! I don't know what I'm saying; it's more being treated like a beast; and you know it is, mother."

There was no answer, only Mrs. Rixon's head was bent very low over the loaf, and the hand which held the knife trembled.

"I don't want to vex you, mother," said Tom, speaking more quietly and coming nearer, "but things can't go on like this much longer. Father is worse with me—with me and Ted, perhaps—than any of the others, and if I go off, there will be a quieter house for you all."

"Your father would never allow it," said Mrs. Rixon, in a low, constrained tone.

"I shouldn't ask him," returned Tom coolly.

At this moment the sound of many footsteps was heard, and the claimants for the bread and butter entered.

"Is father in?" asked Mary, a girl of twelve, who seemed to have the younger ones in charge.

The five little brothers and sisters stood in suspense.

"I should just think he was," said Tom, telegraphing an expressive look to his sister.

The children's faces fell, and Tony, the youngest, thrust his small fists into his eyes.

"Oh, Tony, don't cry: it will make such a noise, and father will hear," expostulated Carrie, an anxious-looking child of six. And, to prevent the threatened calamity, she threw her little apron over her brother's head and drew him to her side.

"Then we can't have supper with you, mother?" said Mary, resignedly.

"I am afraid not, dear; your father did not have that extra work to do, after all, so he came home at the usual time. Never mind, children, sit down here and eat your bread and butter and tell me where you have been with Mary."

"I'll tell," volunteered Ted, a bright-faced boy of nine; "but let me shut the door first, mother."

The little party made themselves comfort-

able on the chairs and stools the kitchen afforded, and took their supper with great appetite, while Ted described the delights of the summer evening's walk.

By the time he had finished, Tony was discovered to be fast asleep, with his head in Carrie's lap, and Lucy and Bob, the twins, yawned so heartily that their mother proclaimed bedtime to be at hand, whereupon the whole party, even including Tom and Mary, took off their boots and crept upstairs in noiseless procession, Tom stealthily shaking his fist as he passed the parlour door.

Presently Mrs. Rixon, having seen all her children safely tucked into their beds, returned downstairs. She was bonneted and shawled, and opened the parlour-door, to say: "If you don't mind, John, I will just go and see how old Mrs. Stewart is to-night."

"Go, I don't mind," said a low voice from within.

Mrs. Rixon made a hurried movement, as if impelled to enter the room, but she checked herself and hurriedly closed the door, as if to shut out from sight something on which she was afraid to look.

Yet there seemed to be nothing terrible

either in the room or its occupant. The little parlour at No. 5, Templeton Place was the envy or admiration of all Mrs. Rixon's neighbours, and more than one had been heard to exclaim: "Well, how she can do it on Rixon's money is a mystery to me!"

A bright-patterned carpet covered the floor, the small round table in the centre of the room was covered with books; there were pictures on the walls and ornaments on the mantel piece. Mary had worked an antimacassar for her father's armchair, and she and Tom had hoarded their pence to buy the prettily-painted flower-pot which their mother had once admired in the large china-shop in town. The furniture was plain, but solid and good, and the pattern of the paper more tasteful than that usually found on a cottage wall.

John Rixon was proud of his parlour, and with reason. He often brought one or another of his fellow-workmen home to see it, and always finished its exhibition with the same remark: "It isn't that I want you to think it so mighty grand, but just to show you what you could do with the money you spend on your pipe and your glass. I tried smoking and drinking myself

till I got sick of both, and then I tried this way of getting rid of my money, and, take my word for it, it's a better."

In fact, John had for years been a total abstainer and a non-smoker. He had a well-deserved reputation for steadiness, and his master always contrived to find some work for him even in the slack times when the other men were turned off. John was a bricklayer, but he could, as he himself expressed it, turn his hand to anything, and never refused any work that an honest man might do.

With such a husband, it seemed that Annie Rixon's life should have been a happy one. But a dark cloud hung over the home that was outwardly so comfortable, and as long as that cloud remained, the poor wife had no pleasure in anything.

When she opened the parlour door, her husband was sitting by the open window, with his eyes fixed upon a book. When she spoke, he answered without looking up, and as if he were too absorbed to notice what she was saying. But Mrs. Rixon was not deceived by these appearances, and would not have been at all surprised could she have seen what took place as she closed

the door. John threw down the book (of which, indeed, he had not read a single word), sank back in his chair, and covering his face with his hands, groaned as if in pain.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" he repeated again and again in a tone of utter despair. "What shall I do?" and he sprang from his seat and walked wildly about the room. "I shall go mad, I think, or else kill myself, or else—or else—yes, it will come to that some day—I shall do a mischief that I can't undo. Oh, my temper, my temper, what a curse it is to me!"

In these last words John Rixon disclosed the secret of all the trouble and misery of his home. The dark cloud was his furious and ungovernable temper. When everything went smoothly, when work was plentiful, the children obedient, and his wife in good health, there was no more affectionate husband and father than John Rixon to be found anywhere. But his good humour was as little to be trusted as April sunshine: it came only in fitful gleams and was inevitably followed by a storm. The children were terrified at the mere sound of his voice, and broke off their games as soon as his footsteps were heard on the garden-

path. Harsh words, hard blows, and unmerited punishments were all associated in their minds with the name of father, and when he came among them each little face was overspread with a sober melancholy, sad and unnatural to see.

Nobody, however, suffered so much from this unbridled temper as John Rixon himself. The children forgot the weight of his heavy hand, his wife forgave his cruel words, but nobody could spare him the dark hours that always followed an outburst of passion. He was passing through one of these ordeals now. Two hours before, Tom had come into the parlour to fetch a book. The boy believed his father to be still away at work, and ran into the room stamping and whistling. Now it happened that John Rixon was already in a bad mood. Some extra work he had been ordered to do had been countermanded, much to his vexation. He came home, changed his clothes, and then, snappishly refusing tea, retired to the parlour to nurse his wrath, and then to vent it on the first fit object.

Poor Tom was the victim. He had hardly realized his father's presence before he found himself in a merciless grasp, and

was conscious of being violently shaken and having his ears boxed repeatedly, while a voice above him was pouring out a torrent of abusive words, which were fortunately rendered half inarticulate by passion.

Tom made matters worse by ineffectual struggles for freedom. He was a big boy of thirteen now, and highly resented his father's ill-treatment. The other children suffered in silence, but Tom made his protest, and paid dearly for it.

It was a painful sight to see the father and son struggling together, to hear Tom's short, quickly-drawn breath and his father's dreadful threats of vengeance. At last it was over; the boy fell prone on the floor, and a vicious kick sent him into the passage outside the parlour, while the door was violently slammed from within.

Tom was asleep now. He had forgotten the ill-treatment and abuse he had received, and was dreaming of the play-ground at school and of an enormous peg-top that Mary had promised to give him on his birthday. But his father was sitting alone in the parlour, hiding his face from the pleasant summer twilight, and repeating, in accents of acute misery:

"What shall I do? What shall I do?—I know what I will do!" he exclaimed at length, starting up with a relieved look. "Yes, that will be an excellent plan. I wonder it never occurred to me before." He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket, made a short calculation on it, and nodded with satisfaction at the result. "Now that's settled, and now I'll make a fresh start. A pound a week? yes, I can always reckon on that. Well, there's seventeen shillings out of that for the wife, and the other three for me. Boots and clothes have to come out of that, but it will go another way if I don't take care. As sure as my name is John Rixon, I'll get a money-box, and put in sixpence every time I am in one of my tempers; and if that won't soon put a stop to them, I don't know what will."

He was so pleased at having found something which, as he firmly believed, would be a complete cure for fits of passion, that the dark cloud of remorse passed off, and when Mrs. Rixon came home a few moments later, she found him in the garden, whistling cheerfully as he knelt down to tie up his carnations.

"Is that you, Annie?" said he, standing

up. "I wanted to go out, but I didn't like to leave the house until you came back."

"To go out, John?" It was a thing that he seldom if ever did after having returned from his day's work.

"Only for a few moments."

"Very well," said Mrs. Rixon, tranquilly. She could perfectly trust her husband, and asked no questions. Yet it was so unusual for John to leave home so late, that she could not help watching him with some curiosity as he walked away. Her surprise would have increased could her eyes have followed her husband to his destination. It was the village toy-shop. He walked up to the counter, looked much relieved to find himself the only customer, and asked: "Do you sell money-boxes?"

"Yes, sir; what sort do you wish for?" promptly answered the young woman in charge. "We have these tin ones at a penny each, and wooden boxes, with a lock and key, for sixpence."

"Thank you, this will do," said John, pocketing a tin box. He hastily laid a penny on the counter and turned away with a hurried "Good evening," for he did not wish to be discovered in his present situation.

Unfortunately, however, he chose a wrong moment for leaving the shop. Two of his fellow-workmen, who had just come away from the "Three Tuns," were passing at the time, and pulled themselves up rather unsteadily at the sight of John.

"Hullo, Rixon!" said one, "who'd have thought of seeing you here at this time o' night? Come, old man, give an account of yourself."

"That's more than *you* could do just now, Tom Bartlett!" retorted John, ill-pleased at the encounter.

"Going into the toy-line, Rixon?" asked the other man.

"I'm going home," answered John, sharply.

"What, ain't you going to let me see that twopenny drum you've been buying?" asked Bartlett, in an injured tone. "Here, Mason, don't let him go."

"Come, Rixon, hand out the drum; and don't look so glum about it, man."

John's face flamed. He saw perfectly well that both the men were far from sober, and consequently not fully responsible for what they said or did, but he did not stop to consider this. "Get out!" he shouted,

dealing Mason a heavy blow; "do you think I want to be seen in the street with a couple of drunkards like you? Serve you right"—as Mason staggered and then fell—"it will teach you to let me alone in future."

"Two can play at that game, though," said Bartlett, unexpectedly closing with him.

John was now quite beside himself, and fought with all the force of awakened passion. But Tom had great natural strength and was not easily overcome.

While the men were wrestling two gentlemen passed.

"Why, what is all this?" said one.

"A drunken brawl, nothing more," answered the other, carelessly. "Come on, it is best not to mix oneself up with these things. We can send the policeman this way."

And they passed. John heard what was said, and it intensified his passion. That he, a perfectly sober, steady, and respectable man, should be classed with drunkards! It was not to be borne. With a great effort, he shook himself free from his antagonist, struck him to the ground, and strode rapidly away.

It was now quite dark. John turned

homewards, muttering with grim satisfaction: "I hope I've given those fellows a lesson they won't easily forget." But he himself was hot and exhausted. He pulled off his hat and took off his neckerchief, which he put into his coat-pocket. In doing this, his hand struck against a cold, hard substance.

It was the money-box.

John himself turned cold as he felt it. It sobered him in a moment. He had told himself that the mere sight of it would be a sufficient warning to him to curb his temper, and he had pictured to himself how it would stand empty for months and months. And already he was in its debt!

Annie Rixon was standing at the house-door, watching anxiously for her husband's return. But the sight of him was a terrifying rather than a reassuring one. His clothes were torn and pulled about, his hair rough, and one of his hands was bleeding.

"Oh, John, what has happened? What is wrong?"

"Nothing," answered her husband.

She pointed to his hand.

"Nothing," he repeated.

"Supper has been ready a long while," said the poor wife, almost in tears.

"I don't want any supper; I am tired and shall go to bed," was the rough answer; and without vouchsafing another word he walked upstairs.

Annie shut the house-door and went into the kitchen. The lamp was burning brightly, and the table was spread for supper. She had made a little extra preparation to-night, thinking that her husband must be hungry, as he had fasted since dinner-time. A glass filled with roses stood by his plate, for John loved flowers, and always was pleased to have some near him. But John had churlishly refused to come into the kitchen, and all Annie's tender thoughtfulness was wasted. She cried bitterly for a long time, then silently and in sadness of heart cleared the table and sat down in the lonely room to work for her children.

Meanwhile, her husband was hastily undressing. He wanted to lose in sound sleep the misery of his thoughts. But just before he got into bed there was a chinking sound heard in the room, and a silver sixpence lay at the bottom of the tin money-box.

CHAPTER II.

FATHER AND SON.

JOHN RIXON was a man of most determined character. It was a saying among his associates that it would be as easy to begin to build a house from the top as to turn him from anything that he had made up his mind to do. John was proud of their estimate of him. He thought of it as he lay in bed the morning after his encounter with Bartlett and Mason. "Yes, that's true enough," he said; "if I was a man that shirked my word, I shouldn't have put away that money last night, for nobody would have been a bit the wiser; I didn't make the promise to anyone but myself. But that's not my way. It's just the same with beer and spirits. *I* don't need to sign any pledge or wear any ribbon; I just said to myself that I would give up drink, and I gave it up without any more fuss. And it shall be the same now. I'll put sixpences in that box until I've done away with my temper altogether; and if sixpences won't do it, then I'll put shillings; and if nothing

less will serve, I'll put half-crowns; anyhow, I'll gain my way in the end."

Fully resolving, however, that the first sixpence in the money-box should also be the last, John got up with a determined air, and before leaving the room warned himself of possible dangers by a long steady look at his new purchase.

The morning was bright and warm. The sunshine streamed into the little kitchen and sent a broad ray across the breakfast-table. With unwearied patience, Mrs. Rixon had made once more her thoughtful arrangements for her husband's comfort, and when he came in she was just setting Ted to pick the faded leaves from the roses.

"How nice those flowers look!"

The wife coloured with pleasure. "Ted, give them to your father to smell," she said.

Ted looked in his father's face with the acute expression of a weather prophet consulting a barometer. The forecast seemed to be a favourable one, for the little boy held up the glass with a smile.

"Thank you, my son," said John, taking the flowers. This gracious reception emboldened Tony to approach with the

announcement: "More woses in the garden."

"Suppose we go and find one for mother," said John, taking the child's hand and looking round invitingly at Mary and Bob, whose eyes were fixed wistfully upon him.

This was one of the bright mornings—alas! that they should have been so few—in Annie Rixon's life. John praised the breakfast, chatted to the children, promised to execute some commissions in the town after his work was done, and finally kissed his wife when she came to the door to see him off.

He walked away, feeling more satisfied with himself than he had done for weeks past. "It is that sixpence that has done it all," he said; "it's the very cheapest remedy for a bad temper."

At this moment he heard footsteps behind him, and a well-known voice called out breathlessly: "Stop a minute there." John turned, and found himself face to face with his two adversaries of the preceding night.

"What a precious hurry you're in!" said Mason, panting. John said nothing.

"Here, Rixon, shake hands," said

Bartlett; "I wasn't myself last night, or I shouldn't have aggravated you so. Don't bear malice, there's a good chap."

"Not I," answered John, shaking heartily the offered hand.

"After all, you made matters pretty square, old fellow," interposed Mason; "what a one you are to hit out!"

John frowned rather darkly at this, seeing which, Bartlett hastened to change the conversation, and the three proceeded amicably to their work.

It was a peculiarity of John Rixon that he never owned to anyone but himself that he was afflicted with a bad temper. When an outbreak was over, he only showed his consciousness of it by marked kindness towards the person who had suffered from it. No word of apology or regret was ever heard from him; even his wife could only guess how deeply this failing affected him by the dark moods which followed its display.

On this particular day he made mighty efforts to restrain himself, and as he walked homewards in the evening he congratulated himself on his success. Not a single explosion of ill-temper! John was de-

lighted; it did not occur to him to reflect that he had had little or no provocation that day. He was like a man trying a boat on a pond, and arguing from its safety there that it would successfully weather an Atlantic storm.

Before many days had passed, another sixpence had been dropped into the money-box. John was vexed, but tried to console himself by thinking how he should spend this forfeited money, and how soon he might safely venture to break the box open. The former point was left for future consideration, but he decided not to open the box until he had passed six months without one single display of temper. Poor John! after each fresh failure he would drop a sixpence into the box and say resolutely: "Now, that shall positively be the last. I'll begin to count the six months from to-morrow." But the morrow or the next day always brought another fall, and the wearisome work was begun afresh. Only his indomitable will could have carried him through with his resolution. It cost him dear.

"John," said his wife one day, in one of those intervals of domestic sunshine which

somehow, in spite of all his efforts, were growing rarer and rarer,—"John, how late you are having your new boots this autumn."

John moved uneasily and said something about not knowing he had any particular day for buying his boots.

"But the children have all got theirs, and I have mine. It makes me feel quite selfish when I see you trying to polish up your old ones for Sunday."

Her husband made no answer.

After a little pause, Annie ventured to say in a hesitating voice, as if uncertain how her boldness would be received: "John dear, I don't want to ask any questions, but perhaps you have had some call for your money, and have been obliged to spend it some other way. You know, we live so well that we could quite easily give up some of our little luxuries for a time and put the money aside for your boots. I never think you allow yourself enough, John; you know I often tell you so."

A look of intense pain crossed her husband's face. "Don't talk about giving up things, Annie," said he hastily; "time enough for that when you are obliged to do

it; and there's no saying how soon that may be." Then, fearing further questioning, he went quickly out of the room.

Hitherto, his own private supply of money, together with some shillings that he had by him at the time when his resolution was made, had sufficed to meet the expenses of his temper. But he had an uncomfortable presentiment that this state of things would not last long, and then what should he do? Could he, without giving either reason or explanation, let Annie see her weekly income slowly diminishing? He could not face that thought, but put it aside with the unspoken hope that perhaps, after all, things would never come to such a bad pass as that.

John privately wondered how it happened that, in spite of all his efforts to repress it and stamp it out, his temper had more mastery over him than ever. He forgot how much his self-imposed privations, and the anxieties they laid up for the future, affected and increased a hundredfold the natural irritability of his temperament. He was unconsciously taking pains to nurse and nourish the disease that was threatening to make a ruin of his life.

Tom Rixon was at this time almost as much disturbed and exercised in his mind as his father. It had for two or three years been generally understood in the family that when Tom was free of school, he was to be apprenticed to a carpenter. The boy had deft, skilful hands, and was quick to learn anything to which he gave his mind. John Rixon knew a master carpenter, one George Adams, who, for old acquaintance' sake, was willing to take Tom on moderate terms; and the business had been almost definitely settled, even while Tom was still far under the regulation age for leaving school.

But Tom now was free to go any day he pleased, and every moment was a burden to him until he began to learn his trade. Yet his father seemed to have forgotten all about the matter, and he let Tom's thirteenth birthday pass without remark.

Three months went by: Tom's restlessness and impatience were getting almost ungovernable. He felt that he could contain himself no longer. It was useless to wait until his father was in a good humour.

"Can I speak to you, father?" he asked one evening, when tea was finished.

"I suppose you can," was the not very encouraging answer.

"I am over school-age now," ventured Tom.

"Well, what of that?" snapped his father; "you haven't learned everything yet, I suppose?"

Tom looked angry.

"There are some boys who would be thankful to their fathers for giving them extra schooling," said John Rixon, sharply; "but it's no use to look for gratitude in such as you."

"I want to work," muttered Tom; "I'm tired of school."

"Tired or not, you'll stop there as long as it suits me to pay for you."

"You promised to apprentice me to Mr. Adams," said the boy, made fearless by desperation.

"Did I?" said John Rixon. And he laughed a laugh that made his wife shiver. "Look you here, Master Tom. Before you learn carpentering, you had better learn to keep a civil tongue in your head. Now go off with you to bed; I've had enough of you."

Tom turned white. "Very well," he said, between his teeth.

"I'll teach you if it is very well!" shouted his father passionately; and the usual scene followed, until Tom's strength gave way and he was locked into the coal-cellar for a two hours' imprisonment. Then John turned to the frightened, round-eyed children and peremptorily ordered them off to bed.

"Annie, have you sixpence?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes, John," was the wondering answer.

"Lend it me."

She gave it without asking any questions. She thought he was going out, and was glad for Tom's sake. But he turned upstairs, and was seen no more until he came to set free his imprisoned son.

CHAPTER III.

A GRIEVOUS FALL.

Ted Rixon enjoyed one special and peculiar privilege. Every Saturday his father put into his chubby hands a golden half-sovereign, two half-crowns and a florin, and when Ted had clasped the whole tightly,

Mrs. Rixon regularly asked: "What are you going to do with all that money, Teddy?" and Ted as regularly answered: "Going to give it to you, mother, to buy our bread-and-butter with."

This little scene was always a great amusement to the other children, for Ted's face was so grave, and his manner so absurdly consequential that it was impossible to help laughing at him. He counted each coin as it was dropped into his hand, and had once been reduced to despair because his father insisted on paying the whole sum in sixpences.

One Saturday he had, as usual, carefully delivered over his trust into his mother's hands, when his father said: "Suppose, Ted, I came home one Saturday without any money, what would you do then?"

John Rixon was just then in one of his soberest and saddest moods, and he spoke earnestly.

Little Ted stood considering. "I should break open my money-box," he said at last, "and give mother the money."

"Would you?" asked his father, absently. The boy's words had given rise to a painful train of thought.

"Yes," said Ted, decidedly; "I should think then that the rainy day had come."

"What rainy day, my boy?"

"The rainy day I'm saving up for. It isn't real rain, you know, father," explained Ted; "it's the day that comes when people have spent all their money, and if they couldn't open their money-boxes then, nobody would have anything."

This lucid explanation produced a burst of laughter from the elder children.

"It's quite true!" exclaimed Ted indignantly.

"Well, my son, I hope your rainy day is many years off yet," said John, sadly, and then he turned away with a very full heart.

From that time forward Ted lost his situation. All the children were in consternation at the new arrangement, but poor Ted was quite overwhelmed. The rainy day would have been absolutely welcome in comparison with the miserable Saturday which was always coming round, and which now brought nothing with it but the melancholy recollection of vanished pleasures.

"Mother, do tell me why father won't let

me bring you the money any more," implored the little boy.

"I can't, my darling; don't ask me. Perhaps some day you may do it again."

"When?" persisted Ted.

Mrs. Rixon shook her head and answered nothing.

"But I know it's something bad," said Ted, with conviction, when repeating this conversation to his brothers and sisters, "because when I asked mother she almost cried, and mother doesn't cry for nothing, like Tony."

Ted was right. Something must be very much amiss when Mrs. Rixon shed tears before her children.

"Annie, I am a shilling short this week. I didn't care to give Ted the money, for it is best that the children shouldn't know about such things." This was John's explanation the first time that he became his own paymaster.

The next week Annie only received fifteen shillings, and the following week only thirteen. She marvelled much in what way her husband contrived to get rid of his money. He was as steady as ever, stayed at home every evening, and had of late even

given up his one indulgence, a newspaper. Yet the new boots had not yet been bought, nothing had been added to the furniture of the parlour, and yet the less John spent the less he seemed to have.

One evening when the younger children had gone to bed, and the elder ones were sitting down to prepare their lessons for the next day, John said abruptly: "You can pack those books away, Tom; you won't want them again."

Tom's face flushed, and he looked radiant.

"Am I going to leave school, father?"

"Yes," said John. In his stern-set face there was no trace of the satisfaction expressed in his son's.

"And going to Mr. Adams'?"

"Mr. Adams'?" growled John. "No, you are not going to Mr. Adams'. You've cost me enough already for schooling and clothes and food; it is time now for you to begin to think of paying some of it back, instead of expecting me to spend more on you."

Tom sat dumb with astonishment. Leaving school and entering on his apprenticeship had always seemed to him one and the same thing.

"You are coming to work along of me," proceeded his father. "You don't want much teaching how to carry a hod of bricks up a ladder, I suppose? You had better be off to bed now, for you will have to be up early in the morning."

"To-morrow?" faltered Tom, pale to his lips.

"Of course to-morrow. Anyone would think you were a fine lady going to be married, and wanting months to get your clothes ready."

Tom said nothing, but looked appealingly at his mother. Poor Mrs. Rixon, however, did not venture to raise her eyes from her work, so he followed his father's advice and went upstairs.

The boy's whole soul was in a tumult. Had he known all the reasons for his father's decision, he would have accepted his sentence very differently. But he had been told nothing, and he knew nothing, and in his heart he believed that his father's one desire was to spite him and cross his will. Had the means been within his reach, Tom would that very night have fulfilled his old threat of running away. He felt utterly miserable. There was not only the

bitterness of disappointment, but there were also the terrors of anticipation. To work under his father, to have the tyranny, which he had found almost insupportable for three or four hours each day, now exercised over him the whole day long, was a dreadful prospect. Tom felt indeed that dark times were in store for him, and he lay awake all that night, tossing from side to side of the bed in restless misery. It was almost a relief when his father's knock warned him that it was time to get up.

"Well, my boy, how did you get on?" asked Mrs. Rixon, anxiously, when he came home at night; "you are back early."

"I was let off punctually; father stayed to make extra time. Oh, mother, I am so tired!" and Tom threw himself wearily into a chair.

"Well, dear, your tea is quite ready, and you can go to bed as soon as ever you like."

"Thank you, mother."

"I like to see my boy bearing his disappointment bravely," said Mrs. Rixon, softly.

Tom set down his tea-cup.

"Mother, you don't understand. It isn't altogether because of Mr. Adams that I was

so set against this. But I'm frightened of father; we shall never get on together at work, and he will do me some mischief, I am certain."

"How did you get on to-day?" asked Mrs. Rixon, her heart sinking within her.

"Better with everybody else than with father. There is a nice man there, called Bartlett. I'll tell you about him to-morrow, mother; but just now I'm too sleepy for anything." And Tom went to bed at an hour that Tony would have rebelled against, as being unseasonably early.

John Rixon had been obliged to buy a second money-box. The first was completely filled with sixpences. What a temptation it was to put it into Annie's hands as a rich compensation for all the weeks of scarceness! But John repelled the thought. "No, I will be as good as my word; I'll have my way in the end, let it cost what it will. I'll be ten times shabbier and ten times poorer before I give this up. I am worse than ever before. Well, they say the darkest hour comes before the dawn, so perhaps this is just the end of it all. At any rate, I'll hold out till then."

Poor John looked like a shadow of his former self. His fine, firm face was seamed deeply with the lines of passion and care; he walked with a despondent stoop, dressed carelessly and with the consciousness that his clothes were shabby and thin, and met the greetings of his fellows with a half-frightened glance, as if reckoning the possible cost of a conversation in which differences of opinion might arise.

He was grieved at heart to see Tom doing work which he had once thought to have spared him, and grieved to see how poor and mean the home-life was growing. But his determination was unalterable. He would carry his point, even if his misdoing brought suffering on innocent heads.

This resolution he was inwardly repeating one day while waiting for Tom to come to the top of the ladder with a hod of bricks. The boy delayed, and his father quickly grew impatient and angry. Going to the edge of the scaffolding, he looked over. Tom was standing below.

"What are you wasting your time there for?" shouted John; "don't you know your way up a ladder by this time?"

"I can't climb it, father," answered Tom from below. "I think I have sprained my foot or something."

"Stuff and nonsense!" was the unfeeling answer. "If you don't make haste up here with those bricks, I'll fetch you in double-quick time."

Poor Tom grasped his hod with the energy of despair and began to climb. Slowly and with evident pain he mounted five steps and then stood still, clutching at the ladder and looking very pale.

"Come on, will you?" shouted his father from above.

"I can't," answered Tom.

"You shall. I'll make you pay for this, you idle young vagabond! Do you hear me?"

Tom did hear, and tried to obey. But the intense pain of his foot produced a dizziness which made the house, the ladder, and all surrounding objects swim before his eyes. His grasp loosened, and he fell backwards to the ground.

His loud cry brought Bartlett quickly to his side. The young man was fond of Tom, and deeply resented the treatment the boy received from his father. But it was not

safe to make remonstrances to John Rixon on this subject, so Tom's friend had hitherto held his tongue.

Now, however, the sight of the boy lying white and motionless on the ground scattered caution to the winds. Bartlett's face flamed with righteous indignation.

"I hope you are satisfied with your work this time!" he shouted, looking up.

For once, John was silent. So stunned and shocked was he at what had happened that it was some minutes before he could trust himself to descend the ladder. When he at last came fully to himself, he found that a doctor had been fetched and was standing by the side of Tom, while Bartlett and the other men were hovering anxiously round.

"Can we do anything, sir?" asked Bartlett.

"Yes. Some of you get a shutter and carry him to the hospital, and then let his friends know."

"This is his father," said Mason, briefly, indicating John.

The doctor looked surprised, and said rather sharply: "You don't seem to put yourself out much about this, my man."

John shot an annihilating glance at the audacious doctor, and said to Bartlett, who was preparing to act as one of Tom's bearers: "I'll do that; you go and tell his mother."

In grim silence the little procession set out for the hospital. On arriving there, they were ordered off by the doctor, and John was told that he might come again in the evening to make inquiries.

His mates fell away from him as he left the hospital. He was a marked man, and he knew it. Even Bartlett shunned him, and would give no other account of his errand than the brief remark: "You had better go straight home to your wife."

John silently put on his coat, gathered up his own things and Tom's, and turned away. As he went he heard Bartlett speaking to the other men. The words were not reassuring.

"I shouldn't wonder if that lad was dead by this evening," he was saying; "and if there's an inquest, it will serve his father no more than right."

CHAPTER IV.

PRAYER ANSWERED.

TOM RIXON did not die, but for a long time he lay helpless in the hospital. Almost by a miracle, his spine had escaped injury, and he had no broken bones, but his foot was in a bad condition, and the boy was well-nigh worn out with pain and sleeplessness.

Bartlett came to see him every visiting day, and he and Mrs. Rixon became fast friends over the boy's sick bed. Mason and the other men sent books and flowers regularly, and were indignant when Bartlett refused to be bearer of pots of jam and rich plum-cake. Ted sent leaves of his best copy-book to amuse his sick brother, and Mary knitted some warm gloves in time for his recovery. Little Tony clamoured to be taken to the hospital, but was brought away declaring vehemently that Tom wasn't there; mother sat and talked to another boy the whole time.

John Rixon defied appearances and never approached the hospital.

"He's ashamed to go, and that's the truth of it," said Bartlett.

"Not he," retorted Mason; "much he cares what becomes of the boy!"

"But don't you think he looks awfully queer since it happened?" asked another of the men.

"I don't know," answered Mason, carelessly; "serve him right if he does."

Nobody would ever know what was hidden in those days under the unvarying expression of John Rixon's stern face. His sufferings were far more acute than Tom's, yet nobody pitied him, and he had no pity for himself. He felt perfectly sure that he could not wage much longer the unequal conflict with his temper: health and reason were both giving way in the attempt, and not an inch of ground had been gained by all his efforts. The indomitable will was slowly yielding.

One Sunday morning Annie had been sent for to the hospital. Tom was not exactly worse, but so restless and fretful that it became absolutely necessary to find some expedient for soothing him. The messenger found Mrs. Rixon busy with her preparations for dinner. The children were

all at church, except Tony, who was playing in the garden. It was an inconvenient moment. Annie looked at her husband. He was standing with his hands in his pockets, looking aimlessly out of the window.

"What shall I do, John?"

"Go," he answered, without looking round. "I will give a look at the things till you come back."

"I have peeled the potatoes," said his wife, hastily untying her apron and unrolling her sleeves; "if you will put them on to boil in half-an-hour's time, and just give a look now and then at the meat-pudding. There is nothing else."

"All right," answered John, gloomily, without moving from his position.

Mrs. Rixon hastily dressed and went out. Her husband watched her until she was out of sight, and then went slowly upstairs. When he came again into the kitchen he held a money-box in each hand. With his large clasp-knife he cut the tops from both, and carefully poured the contents into his outspread handkerchief. It was heaped with sixpences. He drew a chair to the table and sat down to count his hoard. It

had now been accumulating for nearly ten months.

The result surprised John. Seven pounds five and sixpence! It represented more than two hundred fits of passion! Sometimes, when he had been more than usually violent, he had exacted from himself an extra fine. Tom's accident had cost him half-a-crown. Yet, when all deductions had been made, the money told a terrible tale.

John's first thought, however, was a joyful one. What a sum to pour into the exhausted treasury at home! He packed the whole up carefully, sealed it, and addressed it to his wife. Then he took a piece of paper and wrote:

"My darling Annie,

"I am going away from home. Don't try to find me out, for it won't be any use, and you would only repent it. I hope this money will help you along a bit: I have been saving it up for months past. Perhaps I may come back some day; but I don't know. Kiss the children for me, and tell Tom I am heartily sorry for the way I used him. Good-bye, my dear wife; try and soon forget your unhappy husband

"John Rixon."

This note he tied round the packet, and put both carefully away in his bedroom. His resolution was taken. He would leave home that very evening. What he would do afterwards he did not like to think.

Presently the children came home from church, followed almost immediately by their mother. Tom was better.

Mary began to lay the table for dinner.

"Why, John," exclaimed his wife, "you have never cooked the potatoes!"

"Bother them, I forgot," was the hasty answer.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Rixon, pleasantly. She had a very sweet temper.

But John did mind. It annoyed him that he should have been guilty of such careless forgetfulness, and that Annie should have mentioned it before the children.

The pudding was put upon the table. "Come to dinner," was the welcome order.

"What have you got there?" demanded the father, looking sharply at Ted, and pointing to a book the boy had hastily laid down at the last moment.

"My Bible," said Ted, reluctantly.

"What were you doing with it?"

"Learning my text."

"What text?"

"The text I've to say this afternoon."

"Do you know it?"

"N—no."

"Then go and learn it," said his father, angrily. "A nice name for idleness and ignorance you will get at the school! How dare you leave it till the last moment?"

"I shall have time after dinner," faltered Ted.

"You don't taste a morsel of dinner until you know it by heart. Take your Bible and go and learn it over in that corner, and look sharp about it, or I'll give you a lesson on my own account."

Poor Ted cast a wistful look at the meat-pudding, and retired tearfully into his corner. The others sat down to dinner, and he listened enviously to the continual movement of knives, forks, and spoons.

"What are you going to do?" asked John, roughly, as his wife cut a piece of pudding and covered it with a basin.

"I am only going to stand it in the oven to keep it warm."

"Nonsense, I won't have it!" exclaimed her husband. "Let him eat it as it is, and be thankful that he is allowed any at all."

"Father, I know my text now," said a pitiful voice from the corner.

"Bring me the Bible." Ted brought it and pointed out the verse.

"Now go back into the corner." Ted obeyed. "Look this way. Now say it."

The little boy repeated with a doleful intonation: "'I am the Vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing!'"

"Say it again," commanded John.

Ted did so successfully.

"Now come and have your dinner."

At intervals John stopped the boy's uplifted spoon to make him repeat his lesson again. Ted had never in his life learned a text so thoroughly, and set off for school with the consciousness that for once at least he would be independent of the promptings of his class-mates.

The boy's lesson rang in his father's ears. "Without Me ye can do nothing." It seemed to be written everywhere: on the kitchen-walls, on the flower-beds in the garden, on his wife's face. John restlessly opened book after book and made a pretence of reading, but he saw the same sentence

written on every line of every page. It rang incessantly in his ears: "Without Me ye can do nothing."

"Annie, I'm going for a stroll. Don't wait tea for me." And John seized his hat and went out to face this new idea.

Was it really true? Could he really do nothing without Christ? The Bible said he couldn't, and John remembered that in the form of words he used morning and evening, and called his prayers, the confession occurred: "Thine is the power."

Then what a mistake he had made all these years! How often he had said to himself and to others: "I have only got to make up my mind to a thing, and I can do it!" But now he heard a Voice saying: "Without Me ye can do nothing!"

"There is a lot to think about here," he reflected, gravely. "I wish I had brought a Bible out with me. But I'll look well into this; perhaps it's a chance that I've missed."

John Rixon did not leave his home that evening. The note he had written was destroyed, and the money locked up. But when another Saturday came round he called Ted up to him, and putting a

sovereign into the boy's hand, said: "Take that to your mother."

Mrs. Rixon, like a wise woman, asked no questions. She had been much puzzled by her husband's behaviour during the week: he had scarcely spoken to her, seemed not to notice the children, never mentioned Tom, and spent his evenings alone in the parlour, always carefully locking himself in. She noticed that he always emerged from his retreat with very inky fingers, and she detected two large ink-blots on the parlour table-cover. But beyond this her penetration was at fault.

A month passed. Tom came home, looking pale and thin, but with good prospects of a speedy recovery. Ted brought home a prize from the Sunday-school; Mary had heard of a place for herself. But John seemed to take no notice of any of these things: his wife doubted whether he really knew what was passing around him.

One evening Annie was unwell and went early to bed. She awoke from an uneasy doze to find John setting down his candle on the mantel-piece.

He thought she slept, and was praying aloud. Annie caught the last words of the

prayer: "O Lord Jesus, I am quite sure now that I cannot do anything without Thee. I beseech Thee show me what I can do with Thee."

She was much touched by the earnest, pleading tone of her husband's voice: her lips quivered, but fearing to vex him, she kept silent and let him go undisturbed to rest, but joy and excitement kept her awake until daybreak.

In the morning she was too unwell to get up. John fetched her a cup of tea, and offered to go for the doctor, but she made light of her ailments, and talked of being better in a few hours.

Meanwhile, there was terror and apprehension downstairs. Mary had been entrusted with the cooking of a rasher of bacon for her father, and had carelessly left it too long in the frying-pan. She lifted it with a fork: it was a cinder.

"My goodness, Mary, you *have* done it this time!" exclaimed Tom, regarding her handiwork.

"Oh, won't father be cross!" chimed in Lucy and Bob.

Poor Mary looked ready to cry. "What shall I do?" she asked, piteously.

"Throw it in the fire," suggested Ted.

Mary shook her head.

"Father's coming downstairs," called Tony, warningly.

The unfortunate cook, with a gesture of despair, put the bacon on a plate, and setting it in her father's place, stood awaiting her doom. A burnt smell pervaded the kitchen, and met John at the entrance.

Instinctively he knew what had happened. His brow darkened and his eyes flashed. He seemed about to speak, but turned instead to the window and looked out. He remained there so long that Mary, who found suspense even more dreadful than punishment, ventured to say: "Father, breakfast is ready."

"Very well, my dear." He came to the table. He looked at the bacon. "Hasn't the head cook been rather unfortunate this morning?" he said, smiling.

Mary could scarcely believe the evidence of her own ears. The revulsion of feeling was too much. "Oh, father, I am so sorry," she exclaimed, in tears.

"Never mind, my dear; it isn't worth crying over. Suppose you take it away."

After breakfast, Mary rushed upstairs to

her mother to tell her wonderful story: it seemed to resolve itself into a repetition of a single sentence: "No, mother, father wasn't one bit cross, not one bit."

Dark days were in store for John Rixon. Annie's indisposition was the beginning of a sharp attack of rheumatic fever. For months she was unable to do anything. The household was in dire confusion. Nothing was comfortable at home; the children ran riot; Mary was bewildered and overworked. John's temper had never been so sorely tried as now.

Annie watched him. How gentle and patient he was, and how much he put up with in silence! There was rarely a cloud on his face, except when he came home and found her in pain.

One evening she felt much easier, and told him so, but he looked troubled.

"Anything wrong, John dear?"

"I spoke roughly to Mary just now. I wonder, shall I ever—" he broke off without finishing the sentence.

His wife pressed his hand. "John, dear, you *will*. John, you mustn't be angry, but I heard your prayer that night, and I have thanked God every day for answering it."

"'He *is* faithful that promised,'" answered her husband in a low, emphatic tone. He then said: "Annie, there is something I should like you to know."

He told her the story of his money-box.

"Poor John, poor John!" she kept repeating. "And so Ted's text was the message of peace to you, John?"

"No," he answered, "that brought me no peace, but it set me thinking; and,—look here, Annie." He pulled a paper from his pocket, opened it, and put it into her hand. "That was my work those evenings I was shut in the parlour. I searched them out one by one."

She read: "'Without Me ye can do nothing.' 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.' 'With God all things are possible.' Only those, John?"

"I read the New Testament through to find them. At last I was convinced there was nothing to do but just believe them. I felt my great sinfulness, and came to know that without the help of the Holy Spirit, I should go on falling into my besetting sin; so I came to Jesus just as I was, and left all with Him, and

humbly and prayerfully accepted Him as my Saviour. It was a happy day for us both, Annie, when I took God at His word."

It was indeed. There was a sunshine now in the Rixon's home that death itself could not drive away; there was a peace in John's heart such as no money could ever buy.

By-and-by the little parlour received a new ornament. An illuminated copy of Ted's text hung in a conspicuous place on the wall.

"Was it dear, father?" asked Ted, looking with awe at the golden capitals.

"Not too dear for a rich man, my boy."

"Are you rich, father? Have you opened your money-box?" asked Bob, innocently.

"Yes, and spent my last shilling in buying this."

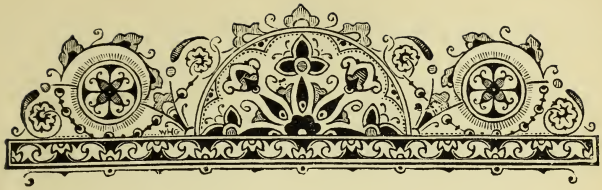
"And you will begin to save in a new one," said Ted, gravely.

"No, never," answered John, emphatically.

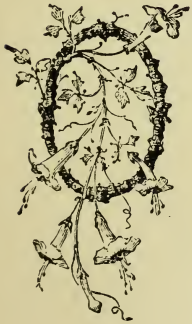
"Why not?" persisted Ted.

"There is no need," answered his mother, quietly.

And the eyes of husband and wife met in a look of unutterable thankfulness.



THE STORY OF A HUMBLE LIFE.



ONE day, many years ago, I found myself walking along a bonny country road, that skirted the foot of a breezy Scottish mountain. I was na used to walks like this, for my home was in a large and busy town, where the noise of machinery and the smoke and din of factory life were an every-day experience to me. And oh! but the contrast was sweet: to hear nothing but the lark far above me singing his joyous song of liberty, and the bleating of the bonny wee lambs on the hill-side; to see the green trees waving their branches in

the summer breezes, and all the hill-side in a glow of yellow blossom!

My heart was unco' heavy at this time, for though I was but young in years, I was a weary-hearted widow woman, all alone in the world, save for my wee Effie, the darling of my heart; and yet, sad-hearted as I was, I couldna but stand and admire all this wealth of beauty, which seemed such a common thing to the country folks about me, but was so strange and sweet to me.

And what was I doing here, among the bonny sights and sweet sounds of the country, while my wee bairn lay all alone in our gloomy dark room at home, with her pale face and her weary cough, longing for mother to come back? I was looking for a cheap country lodging to which I might take my darling Effie, and let her have still a chance of her young life, if so be that the good God would spare her to me a little longer. For oh! but she was a weakly wee thing, and high time it was that she had a breath of caller air to put life into her heart and colour to her pale cheeks!

Just when I was resting me a minute and admiring the grand hill all around, I forgathered wi an auld wife travelling the same

road as mysel'. An auld hieland body was she, as I guessed, in a red and black checked mantle, and a mutch on her head as white as soap and starch could make it. I liked the look o' her, for she was a weel-favoured auld body, and, I dare to say, had been a bonny lass in her time. She might have been seventy years of age now; but the old eyes were still soft and gentle, and the wrinkled face was streaked with red, just like a winter apple.

We fell a talking together, as we were travelling the same road, and soon I told her all my story, just as easily as though she had been my own dear mother, long since laid in the grave. But dinna you think that she asked me any questions; she was na one of that sort at all, but her sweet auld face gave me confidence, and my story just flowed out of my full heart, like water out of a brimming pitcher.

I told her how my Ned had worked at his hard unhealthy trade, until at last he lost heart and strength and sunk into an early grave, and how my wee Effie, my one only bairn, seemed ready to follow her father to the tomb. I told her all, with tears; for, stranger as she was, I knew her heart was

full of love and pity, and love and pity did na often come my way just then.

When my tale was ended, I asked her if she knew of any cheap lodging thereabout where I could take my bairn.

The auld body seemed to hesitate for a wee while, and then she said she didna know of anyone who let lodgings thereabout except herself; and said she, with a bit laugh,—"It wadna do for me to be recommending my ain room to ye."

But my heart leaped up in a moment. "I'll come to ye if ye'll tak me in," I said; for I felt that to live with that calm bonny-faced auld woman would just be a rest to my weary heart.

"Well," said she, "wait till ye see the room, and if it pleases you, we will na quarrel about the terms."

In a few minutes we came to the quiet little village, with its thatched cottages and its yellow-haired rosy little bairns standing at the doors. Ah! my wee pale-faced Effie! if mother could only see you look somewhat like these bonny bairns!

My new friend took a key from her pocket, and opened the door of a wee bit house that stood in its own garden, with a

bee-hive and a sun-dial standing just beside each other. And, oh! the bonny flowers! roses and sweet williams and marigolds, and many others, the names of which I didna know.

She showed me a neat wee room, so clean and fresh, and said she,—"I'll let you have this room for three shillings a week, and I'll boil your kettle and make your broth and porridge, and that will save you coals, for ye will na need a fire in your room this July weather."

And so the bargain was made, and next day I brought out my wee Effie in my arms, and carried her in through the gate into the garden. The dear bairn gazed about her with wondering eyes; then she suddenly turned and looked up in my face with such a smile! It made me think of heaven. Oh, how glad was I that I had brought her out to this bonny place! and sweet it was to a mother's heart to see day by day how the bairn seemed to pick up a new life in the fresh mountain air. She would sit among the flowers, and never weary, while I would be helping Dame Rundell with her work; for well I knew that I was paying very little for my country lodgings to the

good old woman. And how kind she was to my bairn! Never did she milk her cow, but a nice wee jug of fresh milk was carried to Effie. Ah! she had a mother's heart in her bosom, though she might never have had a bairn of her own.

Well, the month slipped away just too soon, and I looked sorrowfully at my bairn as I thought of the day when she must go back with me to the dull and darksome town. The old dame seemed to know my thoughts; for one day, when I couldna keep back my tears, she said to me—

"'Lizbeth, why not make your home here,—you and your bairn? I have been speaking to the ladies at the Hall, and they will gladly give you work, for you are a grand sewer; and, please God, we shall see Effie a strong little lass yet."

I just put my arms round her neck, and fairly kissed the wrinkled cheek of my old friend. Would I stay! Oh, so gladly; never more did I wish to live among the smoke and the dust of the crowded town, now that I had experienced the sweetness of a country life, and had seen the look of brightness that was fast spreading over the face of my wee Effie.

Soon it was all arranged, and how thankful I was that my dear mother had taught me all kinds of fine sewing when I was a bairn, for though it would have been but a poor living in the city, with all its crowds of poor folk competing for work and daily bread, it was very different here. The cottagers about had neither time nor training for work of this kind, and the kind ladies at the Hall had almost more to give me than I could undertake to do.

For a whole year after this I think I was the happiest woman in the country side. I didna seek to make many friends; I worked hard, helped the old dame, and looked after my bairn. Many a time I carried her in my arms to the sweetly scented pine-wood, or away among the purple heather, where the bees were hard at work from morning till night; but at the end of a year a terrible fear sprung up in my heart. My wee Effie had grown better up to a certain point, but she never seemed to get any further. She did not grow; and although she would sit all day among the flowers, I could not tempt her to run and play like the other bairns. Often I wondered if Mrs. Rundell noticed it too,

but I could not bear to ask her. At last one day, when little Effie refused to eat anything, I said to my old friend,

"I canna think what ails the bairn; she looks so weeny and pale. What do you think?"

Then the old woman looked me in the face with her kind soft eyes.

"'Lizbeth," she said, "would you grieve very sore if your little Effie was taken away to dwell among the happy angels?"

"Oh, hush, hush!" I cried; "I canna bear to hear you speak that way;" and a sore feeling rose up in my heart; for the first time I felt angry with my old friend. "Ah," said I, "it is easy for you to say that—you who never were a mother; but for me to part with my wee Effie, I might just as well die!"

"And you think I don't know a mother's heart?" said the old dame in a tremulous voice,—"I who parted with my only son ten long years ago—my only son who lies buried in the wilds of Australia?"

I was struck dumb for a minute, ashamed of my harsh words and angry feelings, and I fairly burst into tears.

"Dear old friend, dinna be angry; but I

didna know,—you never told me; and my heart was sore about my bairn!"

Then we were reconciled in a moment; she wasna one to keep anger in her heart.

But it was all too true about my bairn. My wee Effie was fading away before my eyes, and it wasna long till I was called upon to take my last farewell of my darling, and to lay the frail and wasted body beneath the soft turf and white daisies of the village churchyard. Oh, the blank in my sad heart! But I need not speak of it; every mother knows what I felt. I could not rest; I wandered from the house to the garden, and from the garden to the pine-wood, and the heather hill; every place spoke to me of my lost bairn, my only treasure! I did not know what to do with myself or where to go. It was for the sake of little Effie I had been asked to stay on with my dear old friend: why should I stay longer? But could I go away and leave that tiny mound in the churchyard under which my darling lay in her long last sleep?

I need not have disturbed myself. My old friend had a strong liking for me. She was growing infirm, and felt her cottage lonely.

She was anxious that I should remain and be as a daughter to her; and I felt that if I did so, I need not be a burden to her, as I could earn my own living. And so I remained in the dear little cottage, giving to the gentle old woman the same love as I would have given to my mother.

One evening—I remember it well,—she told me all her history. Her poor boy had been thoughtless and wild; he had wearied of home, and gone away to Australia sorely against her will, for he was her only one, and she was a widow; but he would not stay. He went, promising to return in five years with a fortune and make her a lady.

"Poor fellow!" she said, "although he was headstrong, he had a loving heart too; and when I got a letter from a friend of his in Australia, telling me he was dead and buried, my old heart was almost broken. That was two years before I met you on the road, 'Lizbeth, and heard about your wee Effie; and I felt as if my sore heart would heal again if I had a weeny sick bairn in the house to care for and nourish. And now, my dear, I canna be here long, and I have been settling my little affairs. I have neither kith nor kin of my own; and

when I am called away this cottage and furniture will be yours, and you will lay me beside your wee Effie."

You may guess how surprised I was! To think that I, who had been the poorest and most friendless of creatures, should come to have a house and furniture of my own! But, oh! does it not sometimes seem as though God's blessings when they do come, come too late for us to enjoy them? If only my wee Effie had been spared! What was a house and furniture to me when my only bairn was lying in her little grave? But, oh, it seems wicked to say so, for God has been good to me, and I little knew at that time what blessings were still folded up for me in the future.

Dear old Mrs. Rundell did not live very long after my darling. I think she missed her more than I ever knew, and she seemed just to pine away, till at last, in alarm, I sent for the doctor.

"She won't be here long," he said; "and all you can do is to feed her well, and keep her comfortable and warm."

The clergyman was very kind too: nearly every day he came to read to her; and it was a beautiful sight to see the soft blue

eyes of my old friend as she lay listening to the tender words of our Saviour—"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I mind well when that verse was read to her. She put out her old hand, and she gently said—

"Ah yes, I have taken Him at His word there: I have gone to Him when I was downcast and weary, and I can testify that He has given me rest."

Then, thinking she had been too forward in interrupting the good gentleman, she begged his pardon, and asked him to go on with the reading, which he did.

To me it was very sweet to hear her speak that way; for although I had gone through many trials and troubles, I could not have said so much; but from that day a strange longing grew up in my heart that I too should know in my own experience the sweet trustfulness which was the marked feature of her character, and which gave such a settled peace and repose to her life and even to her countenance.

Her death, when it came to the very last with her, was peaceful as could be. I was busy preparing tea one evening when she called me to come to her.

"'Lizbeth," she said faintly, "I am going now, going to my Saviour; good-bye, my daughter; and may God be with you."

I had scarcely time to think what I should do, when the sweet old eyes closed, never more to open on this world; and, oh! surely never a gentler spirit passed away to its eternal home.

After the funeral was over, I tried to settle down in the little cottage, which was now my own, but I was strangely restless and sad. I was never one who could live happily alone. I must always have some one about me, to smile when I came in and to miss me when I went out; and now that both Effie and my old friend were gone, the loneliness seemed insupportable; besides, there were other things troubling me just now, as well as the dreariness of my solitary position. As I said before, a strange feeling had lately risen up in my heart, a great longing after peace, restfulness, and composure of spirit, those traits of character which had been so conspicuous in the life of my old friend. When these thoughts first occupied my mind, I had imagined that this peacefulness came with age; and that should I live to be as old as Mrs. Rundell, I too

would settle into tranquillity of soul, and depart this life as gently and easily as she had done. But now I began to doubt this. I began to think that true restfulness of spirit was a something apart by itself, not to be confounded with the mere listlessness and apathy of advanced life.

What led me first to see this was an examination I made of my friend's old Bible. She had given it to me as a special legacy. Of course, everything was mine by her own bequest; but just the night before she died she had specially given me the Holy Book.

"Read it, my daughter," she said; "it has been such a joy and comfort to me; I have found salvation in it."

In the first agitation of her death, I had forgotten these words; but now in my sad loneliness they came back to my mind with great distinctness, and I sat down to look over the book. I would not have you think that I had never read the Bible before: I had often read parts of it, although I cannot say I had ever had much taste for serious reading: and so much of the Bible is hard to understand.

But now my curiosity was stirred. Mrs. Rundell declared she had found salvation

in it. Could it be that I needed to find this too? Alas, yes! I had not read far before I saw and felt that there was something I needed to attain to before I could ever feel settled in my mind again. But my thoughts were in great confusion, and I had never been accustomed to try to unravel them. What should I do? Who could help me to obtain settled, lasting peace?

I think I have mentioned before that I had made very few friends in the village. The only person there that I seemed to care about was a Mrs. Preston, whose only daughter had died just about the time that I had come first to the neighbourhood. She was a valued friend of Mrs. Rundell, and many a time the two old women had had a talk together about heavenly things, which had interested me greatly, although I never had liked to put in a word myself. Now that I felt so lonely and sad, and had my heart so stirred up in search of peace, I resolved to go down to Mrs. Preston's cottage and have a little word with her about these subjects. It was really wonderful to see how the dear old woman's face brightened when I opened up my mind to her!

"Ah! 'Lizbeth," she said, "the Lord has begun to deal with your soul; it is He who has made you sad; but, my dear, the hand that smites is also the hand that heals: you are seeking and sighing now (as the old writer says), but you will soon be singing and rejoicing."

Then the dear old woman spoke really as though she had been as book-learned as the clergyman himself; she made things seem so clear to me; things that I had read before but had never understood; so that I have reason to bless the day that I ever sought counsel of this dear friend. I knew now what it was to be pardoned by the blood of Christ; I understood what Mrs. Rundell meant when she said to the clergyman that she had taken Jesus at His word, and He had given her rest.

Oh, but it is sweet to feel settled about the great concerns of the soul! How can any one be content to live unless they have this true peace? But there, I need not ask that question when I used to live contentedly enough myself without it. But I understand now: it was like the contentedness of a blind child that I once saw skipping with her young companions,

as gay as any of them; the poor lamb did not know what an awful want she was underlying, she had never known the blessing of sight, so her sad condition was no burden to her; and that had just been my case. I did not know the forlornness of my soul without Jesus, and so I was at times contented enough; but now that I did know what it was to be able to say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His," I looked back with a shudder to these old days: I was so much happier now!

Still I did sometimes feel my pretty little home to be rather lonely; and I began to take my sewing in my hand nearly every day and go down to Mrs. Preston and sit awhile with her, till at last I began to think I might as well let the cottage, if I could find a tenant for it, and board myself with the old woman, if she would care to have me in her house.

But at this very time an event happened which entirely changed all my future. I was sitting at work one evening just outside my own door, when a tall, well-dressed man opened the gate and walked in. He asked if he might see Mrs. Rundell for a minute. I looked up at him in amazement.

"You are a stranger here," I said; "you have not heard that Mrs. Rundell died nearly six months ago; she lies buried in the churchyard out there."

"Dead!" repeated my visitor; "then I am too late, too late!"

After a pause, he asked in a low tone, "Was she long ill?"

"A few weeks," I replied; "but she did not suffer much, and she wanted for nothing."

"And who are you?" he next inquired, after a pause. "Are you a relative of the family?"

The question seemed abrupt, but it was not asked in an offensive manner.

"No," I said; "I was only a lodger; I had lived with her for over two years."

There was another pause, during which the stranger looked all around him.

"Ah, the old sun-dial and the beehive! How well I remember them!" said he in a dreamy tone.

"Were you ever here before?" I asked, with some curiosity, thinking that the stranger might have been a friend of her son. "Did you know Mrs. Rundell?"

"Young woman," he replied, with some dignity, "I am her only son."

I started to my feet, as I might well do, and the colour flew into my face.

"She told me her son was dead—he died far away in Australia. You must be trying to deceive me!" I said, in some perturbation of spirit, for it all seemed so strange to me.

"The letter telling of my death was a deception—a cruel trick played upon me by one who has now gone to his account," said my visitor. "I need not enter upon the story with you. Had my poor mother lived, I would have told her all."

"But why did you never write?" said I, reproachfully. "How she mourned for you! what grief it cost her! Why did you not write?"

"I cannot explain that either," he said. "There were reasons to prevent me doing so at the time, and afterwards I was ashamed to do so when so long a time had passed. But," and he hesitated, "how do you happen to be living here now?"

I coloured up, feeling the awkwardness of my position; but I explained it all in a few minutes, adding—"Of course, if you prove yourself to be George Rundell, this cottage and furniture I shall at once give

up to you. It is only simple justice to do so."

"Does William Forrest, the miller, still live here?" he asked; "or John Paterson, who keeps the post-office? If they are still here, they will know me well. I can easily prove to you that I am George Rundell. But won't you invite me in for a few minutes, and let me sit down?"

"If you won't think me rude," I replied, "I would wish you rather to return to-morrow. I have a deal of work to get through yet to-night."

"Ah! well, you scarcely believe in me," he said; "and it is very natural. But I shall go to the village, and seek out my old friends. Good evening, ma'am;" and touching his hat, my visitor turned and slowly walked away.

And so I was homeless once more, friendless and childless also! and my heart felt a little bitterness towards this man, who might be said to have broken his mother's heart, and had now come back to turn me out of my little home; but a few minutes' reflection showed me how wrong I was.

If my old friend had known that her

son was alive, she would never have left her property to me. Of that I felt certain, and that I should return it at once to her son was my bounden duty, and ought to be my pleasure. But I resolved to put on my bonnet, and run down to Mrs. Preston, and talk it all over with her; for my mind was confused and my heart agitated, and I felt I could no longer bear the secret all alone.

The following day, almost before I had finished tidying up my house, George Rundell was back again, accompanied by William Forrest, the miller.

"Well, 'Lizbeth," said the latter, "I am here to testify to George. There can be no doubt as to who he is; but though I am main glad to see him back again, I am sorry that it makes such a change to you."

"Don't say that," I replied, shaking hands with George; "he is welcome to his own property, and I hope he may long enjoy it."

"Well, that is kind of you," said the stranger, evidently relieved. "But what do you think of doing, ma'am—Mrs.—but I have not heard your name yet."

"My name is Morton," said I, "but everyone calls me 'Lizbeth, and you are welcome to do the same. Please don't trouble about me; I have arranged to live with old Mrs. Preston, who was a dear friend of your mother, and who is glad to have me for a lodger."

"Well, now," said the hearty miller, "that does fit very neatly. The old lady lives alone, and of course will be glad to have a nice tidy body like you with her, and she has a spare room, too, but terrible little furniture, I fear."

"Oh, we shall do very well," said I, with tears in my eyes. The old miller was so kind and hearty, it quite touched my heart. Somehow a little kindness always made my heart swell and my eyes brim over. "I shall be ready to leave to-morrow; and if you, Mr. Rundell, will call at Mrs. Preston's you will get the key." And so it was all arranged, and I left the pretty little cottage, as I thought, for ever.

In a very few days I was right glad of the change, and happier than I had been since my little Effie's death.

We saw a good deal of George, and I must say he improved very much on further

acquaintance. He never wearied of hearing about his mother, and lamenting that he had not reached home in time to see her once more. He also expressed himself as very grateful to me for taking care of her in her last days, and thanked me so often, that at last I begged him to say no more about it. He seemed anxious, too, to hear about my little Effie, and asked a great many questions about her; but somehow I did not care to talk about her to him.

What was she to him? She was a part of my own old life, my city life. She was my dear Ned's bairn; she was in her little grave, and this part of my life was like a closed book. I could not open it up for the cool inspection of a stranger; so I let him see that this was not to be a subject of talk between us.

Talking of my lost darling, there was one thing that was a deep grief to me; I was not able to put up any kind of headstone to her memory. It would have cost much more than I could venture to give, and I had just to try to put it out of my mind altogether. And, after all, I was not likely to forget her, my one wee lost lamb! No headstone was needed to keep her in my recollection, and

her little life was nothing to anyone else in all this wide world, now that old Mrs. Rundell was gone. Still when I went to the village churchyard, as I did every Sunday after morning service was over, I used to say to myself—"Well, who knows I may some day be able to fulfil my heart's desire, but not now." I little knew how very soon my desire was so be gratified.

One Sunday, about a year after George Rundell's return, I had gone as usual to my child's grave. It was a lovely day in early summer, and the birds were in full song. My attention was drawn to a bright little chaffinch which was hopping gaily among the grassy hillocks all around, and I had reached little Effie's quiet corner before I was aware. Oh, think of my feelings when I saw a neat white marble cross at the head of my darling's resting-place, with this inscription—

Sacred to the Memory of
LITTLE EFFIE,
Who Died 10th March, 1855,
Aged Seven Years.

My surprise was so great that I felt my head swim, and my eyes filled with tears.

My wish was accomplished, but by whom?

I could not doubt but that it was planned by George. I remembered his questions about Effie, and my cold, ungrateful reticence about her. Then it was not unfeeling curiosity that had prompted his questions! He had thought of this kindness. He had intended to show sympathy with me in my bereavement! The revulsion of feeling was so great that I felt inclined to run and seek him, and beg him to accept my grateful thanks, and to forgive me for my coldness and rudeness to him. But I did not need to run and look for him. There he was, coming straight to the little grave, doubtless to enjoy my surprise.

"Oh, Mr. Rundell," I said, "how good you are! I know this is your work. My darling little Effie! how I have longed to see her name placed there; but I am poor, you know, and—— "

But George interrupted me. "'Lizbeth," he said, simply, "I was putting up a stone to the memory of my dear mother, and could I pass by the little grave so dear to you after all your kindness to her? It was a pleasure to me to be able to do you a service, for, 'Lizbeth, my mother loved you; and I love you. How could

I ever turn you out of your home? Will you come back, 'Lizbeth, and be my wife? I really cannot stay there any longer without you. Will you come back, 'Lizbeth? What do you say?"

Well, I scarcely knew what to say, for I was taken by surprise. It may seem strange, but I had not been anticipating anything of this kind; perhaps because I was no longer a young girl, who might naturally be looking forward to such a change in her life. But I did like George; I could not deny it. He was manly and true, grave and reverent in church, and had long since repented of his early unkindness to his mother. Could I trust myself in his hands? But all this time he was waiting his answer; so what could I say but "Yes"?

Twenty-five years have passed since then, and we are in the dear old cottage still. Never once have I regretted the step I took in marrying George Rundell: he has been a good, kind husband to me; and, thanks be to God, he is still hale and hearty, and cheerful as the day is long. He is forester to the family up at the Hall, and it is work that just suits him.

Of our six children, two little daughters

are laid beside Effie in the quiet churchyard; our two sons are in Canada, where they are both likely to do well; our two youngest are still at home. Dear, good girls they are, and always ready to save me any extra work or fatigue. But when I look at them, sometimes my thoughts wander away back to the time when I was a lonely young widow, and had come by chance, as I thought, to the village in search of a temporary shelter for my poor dying bairn. I could recollect how, as I stood to rest me on the road, and to drink in the sweet sounds of country life, I had met with a little old woman whose soft eyes and tender expression had won my sad heart.

Oh, how the Lord has led me all along! How good He has been to me! I see it all now, though everything was misty and dark to me then. How He has sheltered me and cared for me;—given me a kind home on earth, and taught me how to reach the blessed home in heaven!

Some old writer says, "He who marks God's providences, will have providences to mark." I have found it true in my own experience, and I have tried to impress this truth upon my dear bairns.

THE FLOWER SHOW;

OR, BENNY'S BOUQUET.

WELL, Benny, how did you get on at school to-day?" asked Widow Broad, as her little son, with his bag of books and slate under his arm, entered the cottage where his mother was sitting at work.

"Very well, mother," answered Benny, "and I have something to tell you."

"What is that?" inquired Mrs. Broad.

"Guess," said Benny.

"How can I guess?" answered his mother.

"Well, then, I must tell you. You know we have our holidays in another

week, and we are to have a breaking-up party; and there is to be a flower show. Each of us that likes can enter his name to-morrow, and those that take the best bunches of cut flowers will have prizes. I shall try, mother; perhaps I shall get a prize." Benny spoke very rapidly, and his eyes sparkled with delight at the anticipation of the prize he might win.

"Yes, you must try; and very likely you will get a prize, for there isn't a boy or girl in the village can make a prettier nosegay than you," answered Mrs. Broad.

"There will be two classes," said Benny, "garden flowers and wild flowers. I shall try in both."

All that evening Benny could think or speak of little else but the coming flower exhibition. Indeed, so eager was he to see what he could do that, immediately after he had had his tea, he started out, and gathered a number of wild flowers, and began to practise making them up into elegant bouquets.

"There, mother, what do you think of that?" he inquired, when he had arranged and re-arranged his flowers a great many times.

"It is very pretty, Benny," answered his mother; "and if you practise a little every day, you will be able to make a beauty for the show."

"I wish I could make up a garden nosegay," said Ben; "but I must let the flowers in the garden be, so that I can have a good pick from them next week."

Some of the boys at school had taken a dislike to Benny, and never seemed so happy as when teasing him. They tried to annoy and torment the poor little orphan in every conceivable manner, and often succeeded in drawing tears to his eyes, though they could not rouse him to anger. Most of the other boys would have made complaints to the master, but Benny's tormentors knew that he would not tell of them, and they were mean enough to take advantage of his forbearance.

One of the worst of them was Tom Poulton, a son of the gardener who had taken Mr. Broad's place at his death. There had been some little jealousy excited by Mrs. Broad being allowed to keep the gate lodge, which Tom's father would have liked to have had. And although Mr. Poulton had long forgotten what he had at first

looked upon as a grievance, his son had not, and he accordingly vented his spleen upon the widow's son.

But we will now return to our story about the exhibition of flowers.

It was the evening preceding the eventful day towards which the children had been looking with so many pleasurable anticipations. Benny was all excitement; he had already arranged, in his imagination, the flowers which on the morrow were to be exhibited. He had determined to be up early in the morning to go out for the wild flowers, and after having made them up, to gather and arrange those from the garden.

"I am so glad that the musk rose is not over, mother, there are two or three beautiful blooms just ready to cut, and quite a lot of the dark damask, on the standard."

"Yes," answered his mother, "I have seen them this evening."

"They will make a splendid centre, and then I can put lilies and carnations round, and have some wreaths of Virginian creeper hanging down; won't that do, mother?"

How long Benny would have gone on planning his bouquet it is impossible to say, if his mother had not reminded him that it

was getting late, and advised him to go to bed and get a good night's rest, to be ready for the morning.

The next morning Benny was up early, and out in search of the wild flowers; and by the time his breakfast was ready he had gathered as many as would have made half a dozen nosegays.

Then came the arranging them. His mother had let him have two old china vases to put the flowers in, and very handsome they looked when, after many attempts, Benny succeeded in making up the bouquets to his satisfaction; it was a long time before he could do this, however. Sometimes he thought he had done all he could, and yet he fancied a little alteration here and there might be an improvement. His feelings were something like those described by the poet Cowper:

> 'Tis finished! and yet, finished as it seems,
> Still wants a grace.

But after a time the finishing touch was given, and Benny, after carefully covering up his flowers to keep them from the sun and dust, carried them down to the meadow where the exhibition was to take

place. In one corner of the meadow a marquee had been erected, and thither Benny directed his steps. Outside the tent stood Mr. Poulton and his son Tom.

"Well, Benny," said the former, "let me have a look at your flowers."

Benny would rather not have uncovered them, but did not like to refuse; so he lifted the handkerchiefs and exposed his bouquets to view.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Mr. Poulton. "Did you grow those roses, Benny?"

"Yes," said Benny; "all of them."

"They are the best I have seen yet," said Mr. Poulton. "Tom," he added, turning to his son, "you won't stand a chance of a prize."

"I think mine are quite as good as those," said Tom, rather sulkily.

"No, they are not," answered his father.

"And look at the wild flowers, they are beautiful!" continued Mr. Poulton. "Where did you find them all, Benny?"

"All about home," answered Benny, pleased with what the gardener said. "I will take them in now," he continued. "I suppose there is some one in the tent to show me where to put them?"

"Yes; Mr. Blake is there; he will see to them."

So Benny took his flowers into the marquee, and saw Mr. Thornley's head-gardener, who took them from him and placed tickets on them, and gave Benny duplicate tickets.

"There you are," said Mr. Blake; "your numbers are, 20 in the first class and 31 in the wild-flower class."

Having seen his flowers placed among the others, Benny started off home again to dress himself for the luncheon which was to be provided for them before the prizes were given away.

"Mother," cried Benny, as he ran into the cottage, "Mr. Poulton says my flowers are beautiful, and the roses are the best he has seen. I wish you could come down. But you can't leave the gate, can you?"

"No. You must be content without me," answered his mother.

Benny was soon in the meadow again; and before long all the school children sat down to the lunch which had been provided for them; and while they were occupied with their knives and forks, the ladies and gentlemen who were to act as judges

and award the prizes went to see the flowers.

It was no easy task to decide on the relative merits of the numerous bouquets. Some of them were soon disposed of, and marked off the catalogue as out of the competition, and among those was Benny's vase of garden flowers.

"It is prettily arranged, so far as it goes," remarked one of the ladies, "but it wants a good centre; a bunch of roses, now, would have put it at the head of the list; but it is incomplete."

"Yes," said one of the gentlemen; "I wonder that the boy who arranged this bunch of wild flowers so exquisitely—for I see it is the same—should have done so badly with the others."

And so they went on, until the prizes were all awarded, and cards of first, second, and third prize affixed to the different winning bouquets.

Soon afterwards the judges came to where the children had taken their luncheon, and the tables having been cleared, the company sat down, whilst the children stood round, each anxious to know whether he or she had won a prize.

After a few remarks from the chairman, who was Mr. Thornley, upon the beauties of flowers, and the healthy and elevating effect the love for and cultivation of them had upon the body and mind, he proceeded to read the numbers and names of the prize winners.

"In class one," said the chairman, "there are so many really well and tastefully made up bouquets, that it was a difficult matter to decide upon which really were the best three; but after due consideration we have decided that number 17, Jane Brown, shall receive the first prize."

Benny's heart sunk; he had made up his mind to hear his name called. "Never mind," he said to himself, "I am sure to get the second."

After Jane Brown had received her prize —a beautifully-bound volume on Flowers— the chairman went on:

"The second prize falls to number 21, Arthur Sims."

Poor Benny turned first red and then pale, but he tried not to show his disappointment.

"And the third prize is awarded to number 52, William Wise."

What! no prize for Benny after all his care? No, there was no mistake, number 20 was not mentioned. This was more than Benny could bear, so he walked a little way off, and when he thought no one was noticing him he dashed the tears from his eyes, and then slowly returned; he did not now dare hope for success in the second or wild flower class; but here he was agreeably surprised, for the chairman was just reading the number of the first prize as he took his place again among his schoolfellows.

"Number 31, Benjamin Broad, takes the first prize for the best bouquet of wild flowers," he said. And Benny was presented with a book on Botany for the Young.

The other two prizes being given, the children, who had not yet seen the inside of the marquee, since all the flowers had been taken in, were now let in to see the exhibition.

It was a pretty sight, for besides the children's flowers, there were a great many beautiful greenhouse plants that had been lent for the occasion.

Benny would have gone at once to look at his bouquet, and try to find out what fault

there was in it that induced the judges to pass it over, but the crowd was too great, and it was some time before he could get near it; so he contented himself with looking at the others, among which he saw that which had taken the first prize. He was still more puzzled now, for, as far as he could judge, it was not nearly so well made up as his own.

After a time he managed to reach the place where his own bouquet stood, but oh! how altered since he left it in the morning; if it had not been for the number upon it, and for the well-known china vase, he would not have recognised it. The beautiful musk and damask roses which had formed so handsome a centre had been removed, leaving the other flowers flat and shapeless. In his perplexity he stood gazing at the bouquet as if bereft of his senses, until he was recalled to himself by the voice of Mr. Poulton, asking him what was the matter.

"Look, Mr. Poulton, look," cried Benny, pointing to the flowers, "some one has spoiled my nosegay, all the roses are gone; some one has done it on purpose!" and here he burst into tears.

Just then Mr. Thornley, accompanied by some of the other visitors, came up.

"Why, what is the matter, my boy?" he asked kindly. "What is he crying about, Poulton?"

"Some one has done him a spiteful trick, sir;" said Poulton; "he had the best bouquet in the show this morning, but it has been tampered with and spoiled. I saw it this morning, sir, and made sure it would gain the first prize."

"Yes, sir," said Benny; "there were some lovely musk roses here, and a bunch of dark ones here, sir."

"This is a very serious thing," said Mr. Thornley. "Who can have done it?"

This was a question more easily asked than answered, and though all inquiries were made, nothing could be discovered. Mr. Blake, the head-gardener, who had charge of the tent, said that he had only left it for a few minutes, while he went to the Rectory to fetch a flower from the greenhouse, and he did not know how anyone could have done it then. He thought the children were all at luncheon.

"Well," said Mr. Thornley, "the prizes

must stand as they are now; but I am very sorry such a thing has happened, and if we could only find out the culprit we would make him smart for it."

But the culprit could not be found; so he was left to his conscience, as Mr. Thornley said.

"Never mind, Benny," said Mrs. Broad, when he told his mother about his roses. "It was a very wrong thing of anyone to do, but you must not feel too angry about it. Try and forgive the person, whoever it was, and I do not doubt that you will feel much happier than he does."

When Benny said his prayers that night he tried to feel what he said when he repeated the words, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."

After all, the disappointment at the flower exhibition turned out of advantage to Benny, for it brought him under the Squire's notice; and his quickness and intelligence soon made him a favourite with that gentleman, who took a great interest in him, and, when he grew old enough, put him under the care of Mr. Blake to thoroughly learn the art of

gardening. This Benny succeeded in doing so well that he became famous for the beauty of the flowers he grew; and many a prize he took in after years at the great floral exhibitions in different parts of the country. More than this, he lived to be a help and comfort to his mother in her old age, and was respected by all who knew him for the uprightness of his character and the kindliness of his disposition.

And was it never known who did the mischief to Benny's bouquet? Yes, and no. It was known to Benny and his mother, but to no one else. Not long after the show of which we have written, Tom Poulton met with an accident, which compelled him to keep to his bed for many weeks. It was a weary time for him, and would have been more so but for Benny's constant visits. He used to go and sit by Tom's bedside, and read to him by the hour, when all Tom's other school-fellows were at their play. One day Benny took him a bunch of musk roses, just such as he had put in his bouquet; when Tom burst into tears, and confessed that it was he who had spoiled Benny's

nosegay. He had let the evil spirit of jealousy overcome him; feeling sure that he would not himself win a prize, he determined that Benny, whom he so foolishly disliked, should not win one either; so, taking advantage of Mr. Blake's short absence, he had crept into the tent and seized the roses, which he subsequently destroyed.

"But why did you dislike me so?" inquired Benny.

"I don't know," answered Tom, "unless it was that I knew you were better than me. Will you forgive me?"

"Yes," said Benny, "and nobody shall be any the wiser for what you have told me —except mother," he added. "And now, Tom, let me give you a bit of advice. Try and learn to do to others as you would have them do to you, and you will be ever so much happier."

Tom did try, and he found what Benny said was quite true: he became a better and happier boy than he had ever been before.

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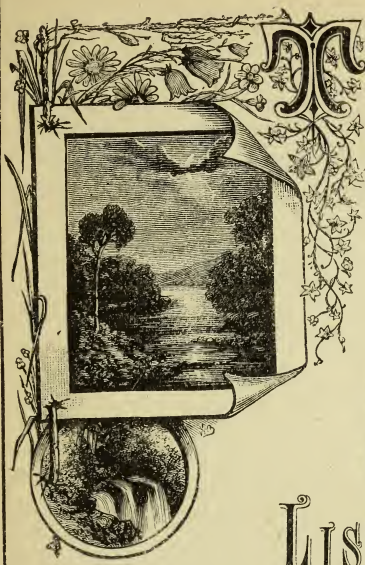

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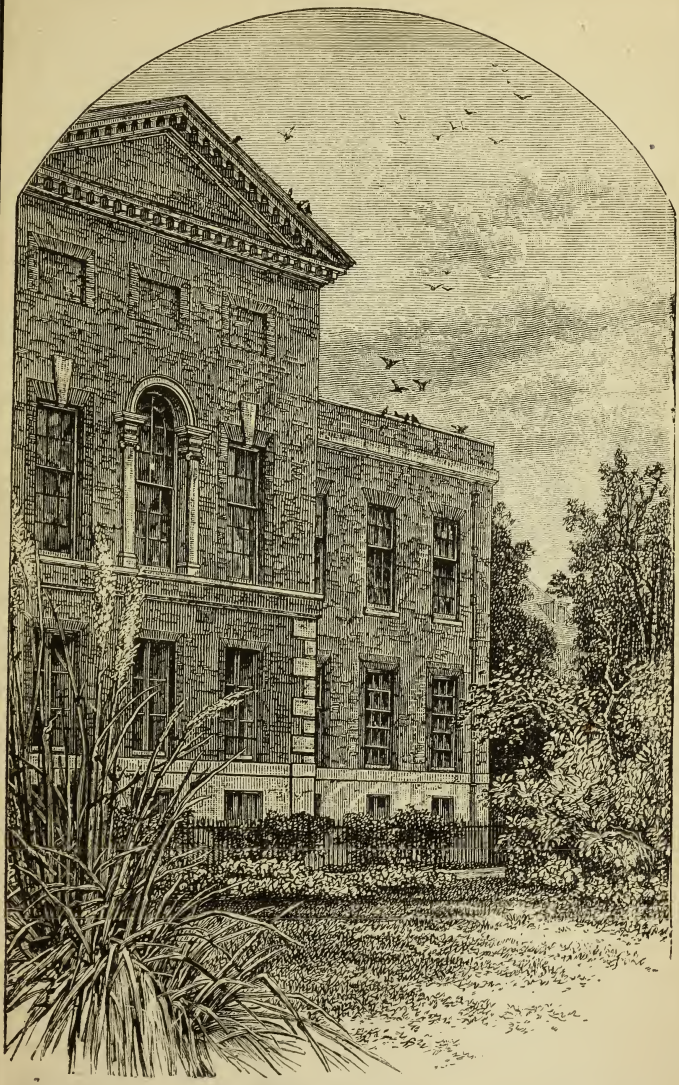

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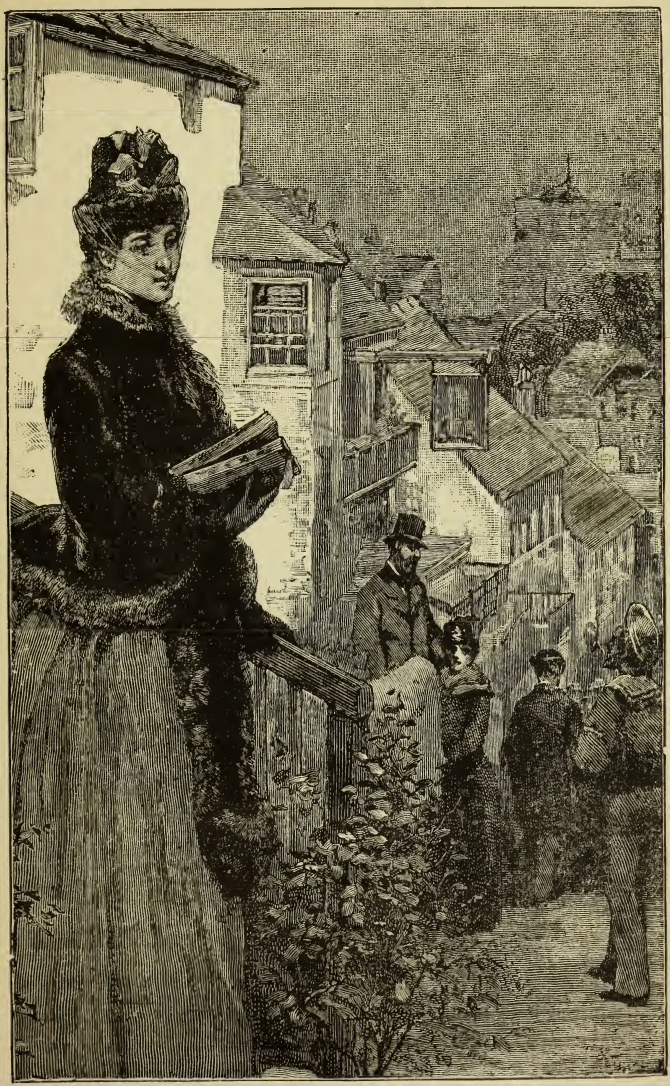

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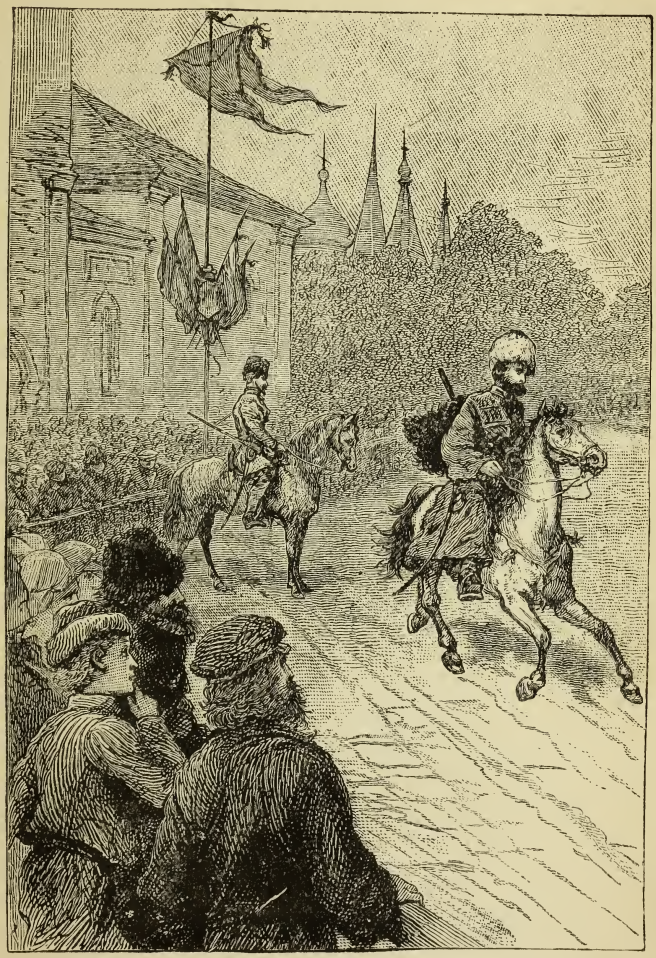

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